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TWO TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN THE *DIALOGUS* OF TACITUS

BY ALFRED GUDEMAN

I. THE EXTENT OF THE TWO LACUNAE

Prior to the year 1901, when Sabbadini¹ discovered in an Ambrosian MS some references which Pier Candido Decembrio (1399–1477) jotted down in his diary, our knowledge of the existence of an extensive lacuna after c. 35 (*ad veros iudices ventum*) was entirely based upon the testimony of the following marginal notes in our MSS: A: *hic desunt sex pagelle*. B: *deerant in exemplari sex pagellae vetustate consumptae*. E: *hic deest multum. in exemplari dicitur deesse sex paginas*. Δ: *hic est defectus uni' folii cum dimidio*. V: *hic est defectus unius folii cum dimidio*. Ven.: *hic deficiunt quattuor parvae pagellae*. C (or C²): *multum deficit in exemplaribus quae reperiuntur*. In D only 12½ lines are left vacant and in H a space equivalent to nearly ⅓ of the treatise was apparently reserved for the subsequent discovery of the lost portions. The printed editions finally, up to that of Beroaldus, give a continuous text, without the slightest intimation of a lacuna. The identical statements of ABE are, of course, not so many independent witnesses, but they were all derived ultimately from a common source, the codex Hersfeldensis, which, we now know, was brought to Italy by Henoah of Ascoli about 1455,² 16 pages of the original being still extant in the cod. Aesinus,³ discovered in Iesi in 1902. B's specific information, if it was not added conjecturally by Pontanus, from whose copy B is directly derived, may reproduce the marginal note of the archetype exactly, but whether it was this codex or its parent MS which preserved the evidence justifying the number *six* is no longer ascertainable.

The determination of the extent of this large gap has, of course, considerably exercised the ingenuity of critics for a long time, but as

¹ *Riv. di fil. class.* XXIX, 262; Scoperti 141, 166. Cf. also Wissowa, Preface to the Sijthoff facsimile of the cod. Leidensis (B), pp. v–vii (1907).

² Decembrio, as he tells us himself, saw the MS from which he drew his information in Rome in that year.

³ See Annibaldi's admirable edition of this MS and Wissowa, *op. cit.*

the exact number of the pages of the archetype was unknown, all efforts in the above direction were necessarily as fanciful, as were the guesses at the content. All that is quite certain is, that the causes which made Greek oratory what it was were dealt with under the same point of view as in the discussion concerning Roman eloquence which follows the gap, this being made evident by the words "*eadem ratio in nostra quoque civitate antiquorum eloquentiam provexit.*" Nevertheless, Brotier, whose slumbers were doubtless disturbed by the laurels of Freinsheim's Livy, attempted a restoration of the lost text, ludicrous both in style and substance, and Habbe, on the basis of wholly unwarranted premises, fixed the extent of the gap at $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire treatise, others indulging in still other conjectures. (For the details, see my *Prolegomena to the Dialogus* lxxxiv ff.) In this perplexity the note of Decembrio on the *Dialogus* unexpectedly came to our aid. It reads as follows: "Cornelii Taciti dialogus de oratoribus. Incipit 'Sepe—retineat.' *Opus foliorum XIII in columellis. Post hec deficiunt sex folia. nam finit 'quam ingentibus verbis prosequuntur. Cum ad veros iudices ventum.'* *Deinde sequitur: 'rem cogitare nihil abiectum, nihil humile.'* *post hec sequuntur folia duo cum dimidio et finit: 'Cum adrisissent discessimus.'*"

As the MS from which Decembrio gleaned his information was written in double columns, a practice which had gone out of vogue in the fifteenth century, Sabbadini justly concluded that Decembrio's MS was not an apograph of the Hersfeldensis but the *original*,¹ and he further calculated the extent of the lacuna as amounting to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the entire treatise² ($14 + 2\frac{1}{2} = 16\frac{1}{2}$). So far as I am aware, this calculation has been universally accepted; at all events, it has nowhere been called into question, and yet the surprisingly huge extent of the lacuna ought alone to have aroused suspicion. For as Messalla had only reluctantly, on the urgent request of Maternus, consented to continue the discussion along the lines designated by the same Maternus, and as the history of Greek eloquence, serving merely as an analogous illustration, cannot possibly have been

¹ It was doubtless merely for the sake of conformity that the additions to the original 16 pages in the cod. Aesinus were also written in double columns.

² *Op. cit.*: "La lacuna comprende circa i $\frac{2}{3}$ dell' *intero* (italics are mine) libro: a un di presso quattrocento righe di una ordinaria edizione di Lipsia."

accorded a prominence disproportionate to the main design of the *Dialogus*, the problem as to what else could have been treated at considerable length, would be rendered still more perplexing than it had previously been. Happily for our peace of mind it turns out that Sabbadini's arithmetic was sadly out of joint, for the wording of Decembrio leaves no doubt whatever that the text of the *Dialogus* in the codex Hersfeldensis contained $14+6+2\frac{1}{2}=22\frac{1}{2}$ folia=45 *paginae* in all. The loss (6 folia) sustained constituted, therefore, only between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{5}$ and not $\frac{2}{3}$ of the *entire* treatise, more exactly $12:45 = .266$ per cent.

This gap is still sufficiently extensive to have included the close of Messalla's speech and the discussion of Greek oratory. At the same time it effectively refutes the opinion of those who, though they also assumed a second lacuna after c. 40, 6 *admovebant*, of which more anon, nevertheless assigned all the intervening portion to Messalla, to the exclusion of Secundus. Right here, however, a difficulty, which even Wissowa¹ overlooked, arises in connection with the testimony of the MSS cited above. Decembrio, it will be recalled, speaks of *folia*; the MSS ABE, however, mention only six *paginae* or *pagellae*! There is no evidence, so far as I have been able to ascertain, that these terms were ever employed as synonyms in the fifteenth century or earlier and, since Decembrio uses *folia* consistently and repeatedly in its proper sense, there is but one way out of the dilemma, and that is, to assume that the common source of ABE had inadvertently substituted the possibly more familiar term *pagina* or *pagella* for *folium*. This explanation is all the more plausible, since even modern critics, like Habbe and Peterson, were guilty of the same error or, like Sabbadini, Annibaldi, Wissowa, and others, failed to notice the glaring discrepancy between the statements of the MSS and Decembrio now existing.

While the unimpeachable testimony of Decembrio, based as it is on documentary evidence, enabled us to determine once for all the exact extent of a lacuna indicated in our MSS, thus disposing of a long-standing problem which would have remained insoluble without the accession of new material, the codex Aesinus, already referred to, renders still more valuable service in another direction.

¹ *Op. cit.*, vii.

Students of the *Dialogus* text are familiar with the equally time-honored controversy regarding the justification of assuming a second lacuna at c. 40, 6, after the word *admovebant*, albeit there is in this case no indication in our MSS of a gap at this point. Heumann (1719), who was the first to notice the "hiatus," did not pursue the thought any further, going quite astray at that, in attributing the preceding portion to Messalla. As a matter of fact, internal reasons of irrefutable validity make it impossible to assign cc. 36–42 (c. 42 *finierat Maternus*) to one and the same speaker.¹ That the failure of the MSS to indicate a lacuna does not militate against such a supposition, provided the character of the context imperatively demands it, is well known² and in the present instance certainly Bentley's famous dictum "ratio et res ipsa centum codicibus potiores sunt" can be accepted without compunctions of conscience. As, however, the absence of external evidence still remained the one apparently insuperable obstacle to a more general acquiescence in the assumption in question, it was a consummation devoutly to be wished that something might turn up which would explain how a lacuna could easily have arisen at c. 40, 6 without leaving any trace of its existence. This highly welcome evidence is now furnished by the codex Aesinus. By its aid it can be demonstrated with all but mathematical precision, that cc. 36,1—40, 6 *took up exactly 4 pages or two folia of the archetype*, which implies that *faces admovebant* formed the last words, and *non de otiosa* the beginning of a page. Now nothing is a priori more natural than that a MS gap would be overlooked if an *entire* leaf had become detached, and this would be all but inevitable if the words preceding the lacuna, as happens to be the case here, also closed a sentence. If it be added, that the majority of modern critics have either failed or refused to recognize a lacuna, we can certainly not be surprised, that a mediaeval scribe did not divine its existence. To suppose, on the other hand, that a leaf was accidentally lost at the precise juncture, where the strongest

¹ See the full discussion of the subject in my *Proleg.* lxxv–lxxxii. Dienel, in his frantic efforts to maintain the identity of the speaker, takes refuge in the paradoxical hypothesis that Maternus-Tacitus intentionally indulged in a series of antinomies (alias irreconcilable contradictions). Not to mention that on this theory the otiose repetitions would still defy explanation, it is quite inconceivable what subtle purpose this early predecessor of Kant desired to subserve by so antithetical a process.

² See also *Proleg.* lxxviii f.

of internal reasons pointed to an interruption of the context, would be a coincidence too marvelous for credence. It remains for me to show how the surprising result stated above was reached.

The codex Aesinus has preserved, as already remarked, 8 folia or 16 pages of the archetype. They cover c. 13,2 *munia*—c. 40,6 *missum*, of the *Agricola*, being written in double columns. The lines, of which there are thirty to the page, are of *irregular* length, very brief lines usually marking the end of a chapter, though they occasionally also occur elsewhere. The chapters themselves, moreover, are more numerous than those of our modern printed text (26 as against 36, with 33 short lines). The *Dialogus* and the Suetonius fragment and cc. 1–13,1; 40,7 to the end of the *Agricola* had become detached from the archetype shortly after the time of Decembrio, who still had the intact MS before him. The *Germania* and the missing portions of the *Agricola* were, indeed, subsequently copied from it by another scribe, but the *Dialogus* and Suetonius fragment were not also added, possibly because these had already been sold or otherwise disposed of and then lost.

Such being the history of the composition of the Aesinus and its archetype, so far as it concerns us here, it is self-evident that the still existing portions of the archetype may be taken as accurately representing the character of the *Dialogus* text as well, including all the peculiarities mentioned above. Now the length of a column line in the original text of the *Agricola* varies between 4.4 and 4.85 or of a double line between 8.8 and 9.7 cm., the grand average being 9.4 cm. An average page, therefore, contained 282 cm. (9.4×30). On the other hand, a full line of a Teubner text measures 8.5 cm. The entire length of the printed Teubner text, from cc. 36—40,6 *admovebant*, is 1025.4 cm., but as 1 cm. of this text is equivalent to 1.1 cm. of the archetype, the same amount of text covered 1127.94 cm. in the MS. Dividing this total by 282, the number of cm. to a page, we find that cc. 36—40,6 took up 3.999, or *exactly four complete pages* in the codex Hersfeldensis. The quite insignificant fractional difference—it actually amounts to less than a single letter!—is amply accounted for by the aforesaid inequality of the lines in the archetype, which in the present instance, of course, eludes an even approximate calculation.

II. THE VALIDITY OF THE X FAMILY V. Y

The apparently trivial notes in Decembrio's diary not only give us exact information regarding the space occupied by the *Germania*, the *Agricola*, *Dialogus*, and the Suetonius fragment in the archetype of all our MSS, but they are also of no little value in deciding, what has hitherto been altogether overlooked, the vexed question as regards the respective authority of the X class of MSS now represented by A (Vaticanus 1862) and B (Leidensis) and the so-called Y class which is generally made to include all the other MSS extant. Michaelis, as is well known, reached the conclusion that the former has preserved the better tradition, and his recension of the text was consistently constructed on that basis. Later editors did not, however, follow in his footsteps, but have advocated with more or less fervor an eclectic method. The exhaustive discussion of the subject in my *Proleg.* cxxix-cxxxviii, concludes with these words: "The Y family, albeit it has suffered at the hands of learned and unlearned scribes, represents as a body the purer tradition. . . . A does, indeed, faithfully reproduce its archetypon. But that archetypon must yield the palm to Y, which has proved itself to be more accurate in preserving what Tacitus must have written." This verdict has not been overthrown; on the contrary, it can now be shown, what no one could have suspected before the discovery of Decembrio's notes, that the scribe of the lost MS X *did not reproduce* the codex Hersfeldensis as *faithfully* or as *accurately* as did Y, the parent of the other extant MSS. The 16 pages of the Hersfeldensis still extant would unquestionably have furnished superabundant proof of this; unfortunately, however, neither A nor B contains the *Agricola*. We are therefore confined to the few original passages which Decembrio copied from the archetype merely for the purpose, be it observed, of precisely marking the beginning and end of the treatises and in the *Dialogus* also the beginning and end of the lacuna. Happily these passages exhibit a number of most significant variants, which suffice to establish the statement made above.

D. 35: *rem cogitare nihil abiectum, nihil humile*: Decembrio ex archetypo
rem cogitant nihil humile vel abiectum: AB
rem cogitare nihil h. nihil a.: ω¹

¹ ω = reliqui vel omnes codices.

That Decembrio found *cogitare* in his MS is made evident by the fact that he mistook *nihil abiectum* for its object, and in consequence omitted the words following, *eloqui poterat*. That the effective anaphora represents the genuine reading is rendered certain by a Ciceronian parallel, *De fin.* 5. 57: "*nihil abiectum, nihil humile cogitant*," where, it will be noticed, not only the adjectives are in the same order as given by Decembrio, but we also have *cogitare* as their governing verb. This remarkable coincidence might at first glance suggest some causal relation between the two passages as the most plausible explanation of Decembrio's reading. But such an inference is open to serious objections. For what we know of the work of this Italian humanist makes it extremely improbable that he was so profoundly conversant with Cicero's voluminous dialogue as to recall a phrase not intrinsically noteworthy, and that this untimely reminiscence then prompted him to make an arbitrary change of a passage which he cited, as he did eight others, for the purely technical reason pointed out above. It remains to suggest some plausible explanation for the unanimous reading of all our MSS. I can account for the transposition variant in no other way than by supposing, that *nihil abiectum* or *nihil humile*, having been accidentally omitted, owing to the anaphora, a frequent source of error, was subsequently placed above the line, XY inserting the words in one place, Decembrio in another, the archetype furnishing no clue to the original collocation. The habit of Tacitus in the *Dialogus* of inverting the order of synonyms in Cicero—my commentary furnishes very abundant illustrations of this practice—would to a certain extent favor the order given in the MSS. But be this as it may, it does not help the case of X, for the substitution of *vel*, though easily misread for *nil*, certainly introduces an *inferior* reading, while *cogitant*, found neither in Decembrio nor in Y, looks suspiciously like a deliberate attempt to round out the sentence syntactically.

X fares no better in the following instances, where Decembrio, in agreement with Y, has alone preserved the genuine text.

Sueton., p. 126 Rf.: *Pisonem proconsulem*: Dec. ω, *personalem*: AB

Sueton., p. 127: *excanduisset ut*: Dec. ω, *excanduisse et ut*: AB corr. B²
(*excanduisse ut et*: C, *excanduisse*: G)

The *wrong* reading of AB is here shared by two inferior members of the Y class.

While the genesis of the above variants is easily understood, they prove, in spite of their apparent insignificance, the untrustworthiness of X, the last available example pointing still more emphatically to the same conclusion, for here the paleographical origin of the corruption of X is more difficult to explain, the resulting unintelligible reading being far removed from the genuine text:

Sueton., p. 127: *conspectu*: Dec. ω , *ypseum*: A, *ipseum*: B

It stands to reason that as a rule a reading, whether right or wrong, if found in all our MSS, represents the text of the archetype and this inference is practically confirmed by some of the readings of Decembrio, although in this case the contingency that he too like any other scribe may have misread his copy, must, of course, be taken into account. The passages referred to are herewith appended, the question of their correctness being irrelevant to the present discussion:

Germ. 46 ext.: *in medium relinquam* (for the more usual *in medio*).

Agr. 46 ext.: *oblivio obruet* (for *obruit*, Haupt, edd.).

Sueton., p. 101: *rudis scilicet* (for *rudi*, owing to *scriptura continua*).

p. 100: *nec in usu quidem*, Dec.; *ne in usu quidem*, ω (a very frequent confusion).

p. 126: *cum cohibeant lictores* (*cum cohibente lictore*, Stephanus followed by Reifferscheid).

p. 177: *M. insuper Brutum . . . invocaret Regum* (Absurd, *legum*, ω ; the confusion between *l* and *r* is frequent) *ac liberatis auctorem ac* (Dec.; *et*, ω) *vindicem*.

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